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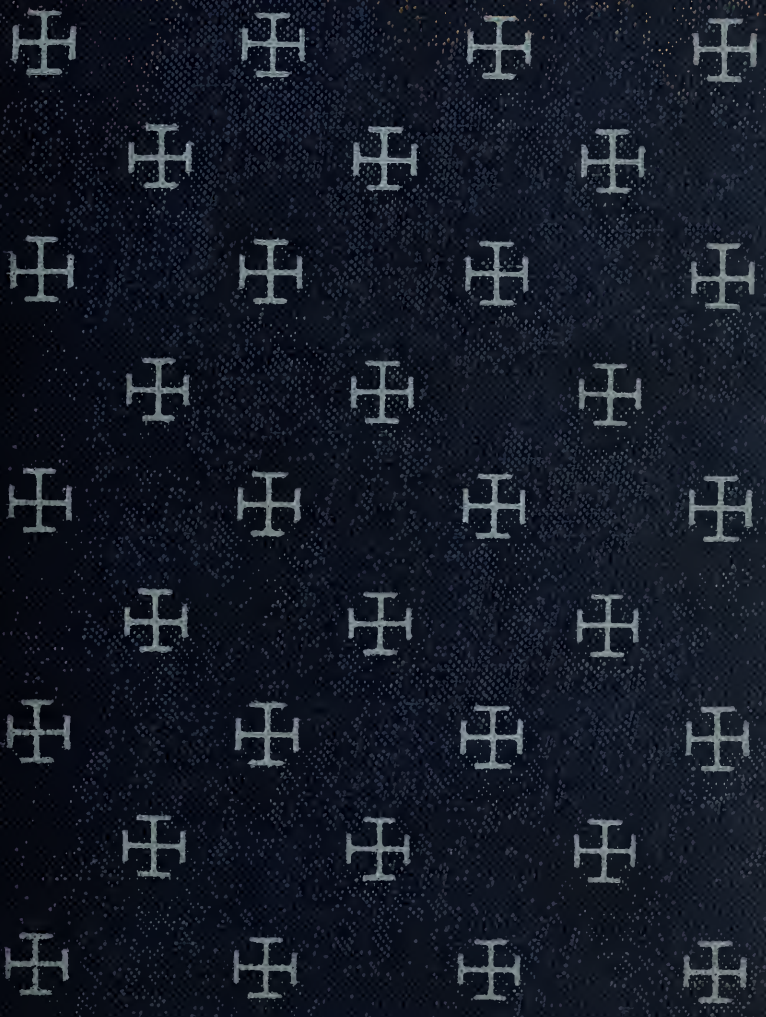
The WINGTOWN PARSON'S LINEN DUSTER



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The

Wingtown Parson's Linen Duster

By

Isabella Pierpont Hopkins

New York: Eaton & Mains
Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye

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THE WINGTOWN PARSON'S LINEN DUSTER

CHAPTER I

Dinky Jake's Company

It was a low, unfinished building, its rough boards varied by knots and knotholes indiscriminately, while through the latter gleams of light and sounds of rude laughter reached out together into the darkness and stillness of the night.

The stillness was almost unbroken otherwise, for just there, down toward the mining quarter of the new far Western settlement of Wingtown, there was little to tempt people out of doors after the sun had set; there was more life in the opposite end of the village, where the few little houses, the solitary store, and the schoolhouse, serving on Sundays also as church, were grouped.

The door of the low building opened, and a man's figure appeared, his hand swinging it apart with a sturdy grip as he passed through. It was only for an instant, but for that instant a flood of yellow light slanted over him, revealing a strong, thickset frame, a long, pointed beard, a miner's shirt, loosely held at the throat by a thick cravat, and a slouch hat, from under which there gleamed a pair of large dark eyes, keen and alert.

The door swung together again, and the man, suddenly resolved into black outline, took a step forward, as if toward the sidewalk, then halted suddenly, and stood in a listening attitude. His quick ear had caught the sound of an approaching footstep and was making its conclusions. He glanced instinctively down at his own heavy boots. "It ain't no such footgear as we fellows tramp in, nor no such slouchy move as wearing it gets on to us, neither," he muttered, as if fearing to interrupt the sound he was trying to catch. It was nearer and clearer now, the echo of a firm, quick step coming steadily forward as if with a purpose, and a figure was outlining into sight—tall, erect, slender compared to

the man who was watching it, but vigorous and well knit. "It's the Parson, sure as sunrise," exclaimed the other, dropping down from the little platform that served as doorstep, where he stood. "Easy there, Parson!" and he held out a brawny hand. There was an instant's hesitation, as if the newcomer were getting his bearings in the darkness, and then as the miner shifted his footing, a friendly knothole shot a stream of light across him, and his hand was seized with a hearty grip.

"So it's you, Dinky Jake! This warms the cockles of my heart! Where have you been keeping yourself all this time?"

"No furder'n right over there," answered the miner, one hand pointing toward the gold washeries, while the other returned the greeting with a grasp of iron. There was an answering chord between these two men, undefined to either, that made each conscious of his blood warming to a quicker flow when they met.

"But I wasn't looking for you so near the Devil's line, Parson. What may you be doing down here at this time of night?"

"I have a sick man over Crazy-Rail Bridge. But what are *you* doing here? I'd rather see you somewhere else," said the minister, as the rattling of dice and the rough laughter of the room made their way out.

There was a tone in the Parson's clear, rich voice, with its high-bred ring, that was always like music to the miner's ear, and stirred him like wine. A sudden idea struck him. "See here," he exclaimed, "we're just having a kind of a meeting, that's all. I say, come in! You're always trying to get us to your meetings; come into one of ours, and see if we don't return it." And he flung the door wide apart, letting the full flood of light stream upon them both. The younger man shot one glance into the room, and then, turning, fixed his eyes upon Jake's, with a look that held him. Large, handsome eyes they were, and of a color that always roused a subtle memory in Dinky Jake's mind. Once, a thousand years ago it seemed to him, a bed of violets used to blossom under his mother's window; and the rough, big-bearded man could not think of them to-day without catching his breath.

"And I always thought seeing was all eyes was made for," he would mutter to himself, "but his'n say things." They were looking at him still, and a smile was breaking over the minister's face.

"Is it a bargain, Dinky?"

"You bet your life! I'll see that it is one," and he took a step inside.

"As your guest, then, Jake; I wouldn't intrude."

"My guest it is," replied the miner, sharply. "And I guess folks that knows me know't I mean my guests shall find things agreeable where I am."

The Parson answered with a light, friendly laugh, and followed him inside. The one moment when the door had been held open had sufficed to show the occupants of the room who was coming, and every eye among the groups round the tables was fixed upon him, and every face showed how its owner was taking the surprise.

"Gentlemen," said Dinky Jake, with a gesture of his big hand toward the minister, "it's my invite! I reckon my friends is generally welcome where I go; it's a friend of

all of us, this time, though." But he was among them already, stopping for a grasp of every hand as he passed the different tables, his head thrown a little back, as was his manner, and his clear-cut features looking strangely white against the bronzed faces of the men.

He knew them all by name at least, and some of them by much closer acquaintance. Steve Steady was getting the first greeting, and as his brawny hand engulfed the Parson's a rush of recollections seemed to make the lights in the room dance, and he felt his eyes blinking. The uncounted times during the last month of his "Sairy's" wasting away, when the Parson had come to the door with comforting things and still more comforting words, to ease the going! How Sairy's eyes had watched for him and how the restlessness had faded from them when he had come and gone!

He remembered how biting the snowstorm was when they buried her, and how vaguely helped and comforted he had felt by the words the Parson was saying, while through it all he had been continually conscious of how worn and poor the minister's overcoat was.

"She won't tough out many more nor'-westers for you," he remembered saying dumbly to himself, through the bewilderment of what was happening. And he had never been face to face with him since! He had never stepped into one of his meetings as a thank offering. He felt himself getting red behind his great brush of beard and eyebrows.

"Glad to see you, Parson," he stammered; "have a seat with us! Take a hand!" with a gesture toward the cards that lay strewn over the table.

"Thanks, Steve, but I'd only spoil your game, and I want to see the rest of the boys. I must be off in two minutes. How are you, Tom? And how are those twins? They haven't been at the house for a month." It was Big Tom's turn to blush now. When he and his wife had both lain helpless with fever, knowing nothing around them and fighting a bitter fight with death, the Parson had taken the twin boys to his house, and kept them there for weeks, happy as clams at high tide.

Scarcely an eye had been taken off the minister yet, but the wonder was beginning to die out, and here and there a man was venturing to look over his cards. "Seems we don't get no sermon, after all," whispered a miner at the other end of the room. His next neighbor's brow was contracted in a sullen frown. "Don't see why a Parson can't keep to his own claim. He don't need to go tramping on other folks' ground," he muttered under his breath.

In an instant he felt Dinky Jake's hand on his shoulder, in a grip of iron and steel. He seemed to feel the bone crunching, and a big beard was coming close to his ear. "See here, Red Dory," Jake's voice was saying, "that's *my* company! And I reckon you know how I expect my company to be treated! Even with myself, and no difference made. Do you understand?"

The grip was tightening, if that were possible, and Dinky's other hand was getting round toward a hip pocket. "All right," answered the man, gloomily, and the hand was dropped from his shoulder.

Again a cheery little laugh rang out from

the minister as he answered a greeting from another table. "Yes, that's true, Dave. Nothing certain but the unexpected, you know. I hope I'm not the less welcome for being so, however. How is that new claim panning out?"

Another undertone came to Red Dory from his next neighbor, who had not once taken his eyes from the Parson's face. "Somehow the smile that man's got on him warms my backbone every time. I'd like to keep it focused on me for the winter months." But the Parson was coming too near for comments now.

"Yes, glad to see you," a big red-shirted fellow was saying as his table was reached. "Say, Parson," and he caught a bottle and glass that stood near, "I say, have a drink!"

"Thank you! No offense, please, but not this time. I'll drink with you boys, but some time when we have got where there's a tin dipper and a cool spring. And I must leave you now, in a moment; I have work to do to-night."

"And no sermon?" came a good-natured voice from under a big mustache. Its owner

was smiling from a pair of friendly eyes, that fixed a half-puzzled look on the minister.

"Not when I'm visiting. Come where I give them, and you shall have your fill. Good-night now!" for the last table had been reached, and the Parson was turning toward the door.

"Gentlemen," and Dinky Jake's voice filled the room again, "gentlemen, I asked the Parson to drop in for a call at our meeting to-night, and he has done it—handsome; now I think it would be handsome for us to return it on one of his. And I'd like to see it done pretty soon, too, and in the best style you can reach up to; and I mean it."

It was evident that he did from the slow way his eye was covering every man in the room and the steady measure of his words. There was a moment of hesitation. "Don't know as we could set so long in a meetin'-house," came the good-natured voice again; "might get a little mite smothered before 'twas through."

"We'll stay outside, then," answered the Parson, quickly.

"Any singing or praying?" ventured the man with the red shirt, though with a swift shot from under his eyelids at Dinky Jake.

"Not if you don't wish it. What would you say to Bobolus' Oak? The moon will be an hour earlier to-morrow night."

There was a murmur of assent. Bobolus' Oak was a favorite rallying place for all out-door speeches and celebrations.

"Bobolus' Oak it is, then, and to-morrow night. It is a vote," said Dinky Jake, and the minister was gone.

CHAPTER II

Old Glory

The early sun of a gorgeous Indian summer day was pouring aslant with the minister's house the next morning, filling the tiny sitting room with a flood of gladness and gold. Just outside the only grove the region could boast was sifting a yellow shower about the house, while through the trees, and across to the line of purple hills beyond, the dreamy haze of the season spread everywhere, till mist and sunlight seemed crossing warps and woof for a day of dreams.

The Parson sat reading, lost in the last chapter of his magazine. These magazines, sent by a friend in the East, were an Aladdin's lamp to him. While he held one in his hand the old life was real about him once more; speech, scenes, circumstances, characters—he lived and moved among them, he was at home again. He forgot the thousands of miles between East and West, he forgot the rough life around him, he forgot how

nearly impossible to make the salary meet food and clothes; he was taking a holiday, he had gone home for an hour!

The chapter was finished; he came back slowly, and turned his eyes to the window. In an instant he had thrown down the book with a sudden exclamation. "Lassie! We are wasting everything! We ought to be out in this! This sunlight and haze are weaving a web for dreams." But the figure he was addressing did not stir. She sat with her head slightly drooping and her hands folded listlessly over a heavy garment that lay across her lap. He sprang to his feet and went toward her, touching her brown hair lightly with his hand. "Come, Lassie! Won't you come? Let us have half a day out in this. What are you doing, darling?" and then as his eyes fell on the overcoat she held on her knee, "What! Old Glory? Trying to revive Old Glory once more?"

She raised her head slightly to meet the caress, but there was no answering smile.

"No, Edward, I did mean to try, but it would be of no use. There is no reviving for Old Glory at last; life is extinct."

"O, not so bad as that, I hope. We must not give up an old friend till it's quite gone, you know."

"It *is* gone, Edward. It is dropping off you. Dropped off. It cannot be made to hold together again, even if I could see you disgraced by such shabbiness."

A shade of pain passed over the Parson's face as he glanced into her disheartened one. "Lassie," he said, gently, "aren't you crossing this bridge before we come to it? Look at the mellow sunlight and this purple haze that are giving the whole world a bath of peace and kindliness this morning."

But she only shook her head. Evidently he was not convincing. "No, Edward, I am not. If we haven't come to the bridge it is coming to us, and from very few steps off. Indian summer is delicious—I'll go out into it with you, dear—but it is a short flattery in this land, where the cold is as sure as it is bitter and as bitter as it is long. You will *have* to have a new overcoat."

"Well, Lassie, well! We will see. The salary may be raised in January, you know. The Board promised it if contributions came

in well this fall. And I promise you the overcoat if it does. Let me take this away from you now. Why, it's heavy still! There must be a few threads left in Old Glory yet!" And the smile that the miner wished he could focus for the winter broke over the minister's face.

The door opened, and a fairy vision came dancing in, the Parson's little four-year-old, a shower of golden hair falling over her shoulders and her tiny arms waving high above her head, as her wee slippered feet pirouetted gayly around the chair where he had laid the overcoat. "Ole Dlory! Ole Dlory! Ole Dlory!" she sang, catching the last word her father had spoken as she entered the door.

"What do you know about Old Glory, Miss Four-Winters?" he asked. "Did you ever see it before?"

"Yes," and the gay dance around the armchair still went on; "one time, a awfu' cold day, you unbuttoned it, and took me in and wrapped me all tight, and said there was always room for me where your heart beated. Ole Dlory, Ole—ah—h–h," as her father

caught her and swung her to his shoulder, her head just clearing the ceiling of the little room.

"Well, it's not 'a awfu' cold day' to-day, Fairy-Foot, and Mamma and I are going for a walk. I want to see if those hills are really purple and gold. Will you come?"

"Co'se I will. But I'd like to go on your shoulder. I can see everything up here. I can see Mamma's face, but it don't look like Mamma's face to-day. I dess you wouldn't let anything be the matter, though. I'd better get down. I'se got boots to button before we go."

She slipped to the floor, and with eyes that would have made Dinky Jake think of the violet bed again, looked wistfully into her mother's face. "I dess it's all wite," as she got an answering smile, and, waving her arms above her head again, danced once more around the armchair, patting the old garment as she passed, and was gone. "Ole Dlory! Ole Dlory!" came back the same words, as from a silver flute.

"A pretty rough garden to bring up a lily-bud like that, eh Lassie?" said the minister,

as he watched her out of sight and listened to the song.

"O, Edward!" she exclaimed, with sudden passion, "it is! It is! Let us not stay in it! Let us go away! We *cannot* do it! And it is terrible to be so poor! I do not shrink for myself, but for her, and for my splendid, talented husband! It is casting pearls! Let us go where you will not be kept so poor! You can do better work than this!"

He gazed at her, bewildered by her outburst. He had never seen her like this before. "Lassie, my darling! There are some words of Robert Collyer's; let me tell them to you: 'If we are poor because we stand true to life and duty we are poor only as the sower is poor, because he has to cast his wheat into the ground, and then wait for the sheaves of harvest. If our life is as God wills, and yet is bare, it is bare only as the granary is bare in June.'"

"But it is always bare here, Edward! June, January, every month! When does the harvest come in?"

He was silent a moment, looking earnestly at her. "I can go, I suppose—if you wish

it—before long," he said, slowly. "My second year will soon be out. I could stay another, probably—or I can go—and they can send a better man in my place."

"*A better man!* God grant it may be, at least a man not burdened with a wife and child!" she cried, with a sudden burst of long-pent-up bitterness.

She glanced at his face; the smile had left it, and she was terrified at the rigid white lines, white and rigid as marble. "Edward!" she cried again, but he did not stir. She dropped to the floor clasping his knee, but there was only silence still. Would he never speak?

At last the stillness was relaxing; he was stooping, touching her head, gathering her up to him—she heard his voice. For that one dreadful moment it had seemed as though she never would! But there was a strange, sharp ring in it as he cried, "Lassie! Lassie! My soul has a quick! Never, I beseech you, as you love and pity me, never pierce it through again!" She burst into a tumult of wild sobs, and threw her arms about him. He drew her to the armchair where Old Glory

was still thrown in disgrace, and held her there, soothing and crooning over her like a child. "My darling, forgive me! Forgive me that I did not realize what all this has been to you, sweetheart. You have been so brave, so patient! Too patient! It has been too heavy for your strength. We can go soon, when the year is out, if you say so—if you say so—if it is your wish. Rest a little now; that is what you need."

He held her for a time silently; then, "Lassie," he began again, "you know we must not hurry a harvest. The granary seems bare to you here; perhaps my sowing has not been good; but let me tell you something, a sign of promise! You know those men down at the washeries—how I have wanted them; wanted them for the Master. Some of them have big hearts that they might give him; but they would never give me the chance, never let me speak to them!"

"Edward, you have spoken to them continually, in every step of your life!"

"Would to God it were true! But, Lassie, listen! They are coming to-night, some of them, to let me talk to them. Out under the

oak, in this soft, sweet air, and the moonlight! Let us go for our walk now, and get our hearts full of gladness. It will help me when I try to show them *the King in his beauty*."

The patter of little feet and the child were coming back. "Now my shoes is buttoned. They took awful long, but—" She stopped short at the sight of her mother's face. Her father smiled and held out a hand. "Mamma has been having a bad pain," he said, "but it is better again. We can go for our walk now, I think, and try to make her forget it all, in the purple and gold."

CHAPTER III

Under the Palisades

It was Indian summer all over the land that day! Almost from Pacific coast to Hudson River Palisades the same spell of enchantment was spread; and in the shadow of their gray wall that afternoon the same haze nestled, and the same glamour stretched to the sunnier bank on the Eastern side.

A tiny boat was gliding through it all, the oars lifted slowly, as if spellbound, and the water dripping from them in many-hued diamond gleams. The young girl in the stern was trailing a spray of autumn leaves, as it went, her jeweled hand and half-bared arm catching the ripples that it made. "Just a tiny bit faster, please, Tom," she said. "We mustn't dream all day! I have an appointment for four o'clock."

The young man addressed lifted his eyebrows slightly. His eyes were already fixed upon her face; they had hardly wandered from it since he took the oars, and indeed it

was a fair little picture under the graceful outlines of her hat. "Appointment?" he said, "who talks of appointments on a day like this?" She laughed gayly.

"Even a day like this has them, though, in this sad, deceptive world. And one of them is mine, and really, Tom, if you will, *please;* we *must* go a little faster. It is almost three now!"

"If that stray lock of hair falling out from under your hat would not look so exactly like spun gold perhaps I could," he answered. She put it up hastily. How provoking that was! And everything about Tom always stayed so exactly as it should. His things were always so correct to begin with—like this outing suit he was wearing to-day. He was dashing enough, too! And everybody liked Tom; everybody was Tom's friend. How happy she was! She wondered how such good fortune—well, never mind!

The oars were dipping with a little stronger pull, and the canoe was moving with an answering spirit. "Thank you! That will do beautifully. We shall just about be in time if you keep that up." They fell into silence

again. The grass on the opposite bank was taking on a deeper green as the sunlight slanted more from the west. A day like this could not last forever.

They had crossed the river and were nearing a pier, and the paved streets rising toward the heart of a town were coming into view. "May I venture to ask," Tom began as he pointed the canoe toward the wharf, "what is this appointment in which I am not invited to share?"

"O, you couldn't!" she laughed; "it is a home missionary meeting. I have to make a petticoat."

"Mildred!" exclaimed the young man, and his eyebrows were not raised; they were contracted with a look of annoyance and displeasure that pulled them quite the other way; "you are not serious, I hope?"

"Certainly *I* am serious. Never more so in my life, or more interested." The look of annoyance deepened very nearly into one of vexation.

"Don't, Mildred! I don't like to hear you talk in that way."

"Why not? I don't know of any way that I could be more highly respectable."

"It isn't your *rôle*. Everyone has his way to go in life, and you and I have ours, thank God, and missionary meetings and sewing flannel don't come into it. I don't want you getting Methodistical."

"Don't be cross, Tom," she answered, gayly. "I fail to see the force of that last compliment, but if it means that I don't want to be entirely useless in the world I accept it."

"It means more than that. I have seen a good many indications lately that I don't fancy. I don't want you getting fads in charity. I don't like you going into such things." Her gayety was gone now; a flush came into her cheek, and she drew back into a cold reserve.

"I do not recognize your right to restrict me," she replied, haughtily.

"I have a right to ask you to restrict yourself in anything that is an annoyance to me," he answered. She felt herself growing cold, but her cheeks were aflame. Was Tom beginning to talk about rights and restrictions?

"And, moreover," he went on, "it's all absurdity about these missionaries. I wish all the young men I know who are earning their living had half as easy a snap. Most of them live in luxury, as anyone knows who will take the pains to inquire, and if there should be a tight place, once in a while, that a man chooses to go into, why can't he go as a Catholic priest does, without dragging a wife and half a dozen children after him, to be miserable until somebody makes petticoats for them?"

Why cannot people hear the first rumble of an earthquake, and feel the first crumbling of the foundation under their feet? Tom went on feathering his oars with a complacent feeling that he had said just the right thing. Possibly he had not said it as gracefully as he might, but it would never do for a superb girl like Mildred to be taking up notions; he thought he had seen more than one creeping dangerously near of late, and it was just as well to speak plainly in the outset and have some things understood between them. He wanted every reasonable whim gratified for her always—he

should see to that; but fads that were going to take her entirely off the track, those had better be discouraged at once. But Mildred was not answering. The languid grace that Tom had been admiring was gone from her outline, the trailing bit of autumn foliage was dropped, her hands were folded, and she sat erect, her face cold and statuesque.

Was Tom heartless, after all, like the rest? Had he no eyes for true self-sacrifice? No spirit to respond to it, to cheer it on? Her Tom! And she had thought they could do everything that was noble and true together, after a while! And she did not like what he had been saying to her, either. If he would begin *now* in that way what might he not say some other time—after a while?

They neared the pier rapidly; it was close upon them now. For a moment Tom stood erect, straightening the manly figure that Mildred was so proud of; then stooped and held the canoe to the steps for her to land, his frank, handsome face smiling innocently into hers. One more evening he had to spend with her before going back to New York!

"One more evening!" he said, joyously, his eyes searching for hers. "What time may I come up?"

But her glance was not lifted, and she sprang to the steps without taking his proffered hand. "Unless you have a right to restrict me," she said, "I may possibly not be at home."

CHAPTER IV

At Bobolus' Oak

The day that had set the whole land dreaming was over. At the East the evening Tom had looked forward to had deepened into night; at the West it was fast closing in, and the hunter's moon was lifting over the hills that had stood as a purple wall beyond the Wingtown parsonage that day.

Under Bobolus' Oak a small crowd was gathering, and the Parson, as he sprang to his place on the platform built against the trunk, was conscious that straggling twos and threes were stepping into the ranks and swelling the outer circle. His head was thrown back, his eyes were shining, and he could feel the quickened leap of his pulse.

At last they were going to give him his chance! At last they would let him speak to them, let him pour out the pent-up words they had kept waiting so long, let him draw for them the picture that had been burning

in his heart, let him show them—try to show them, The King in his beauty!

But what were his tongue, what were his words, to do this? "Boys! My men!" he began, "I am going to tell you something you do not think I know! I have found it out—found it out during the eighteen months we have each seemed to be going our own way and doing our own work. This is it! In every one of you there is something that answers, like a chord that is struck, to anything that you think is glorious, noble, or fine in another. If another man does something better than might be expected of him, stands up big and generous against a meanness, strikes out with a great strong stroke to save a friend or, better still, an enemy, even when there is danger of being pulled under himself, you feel something swelling up in your hearts with a great thrill. You don't say much about it; perhaps you take a sort of pride of appearing to think it a matter of course; but you like that man. You don't like to stand off in the circle that don't know him and that he doesn't know, outside of his set. You don't like to say, 'I don't know

him.' You like to come up close, to feel you can claim friendship with him. You feel better for it and more proud. You feel nobler yourself for being friends with a noble man.

"Now, I want you to let me talk to you a little while about the noblest Man that ever trod this earth, the Son of a King, a Prince and a King himself, yet spending himself for the humblest of us, inviting the humblest of us to be his friend. I want to help you to see our King in his beauty." What should he choose, out of all he wanted to give? And there was no time to lose; he must not keep his visitors too long.

O, words! Words! Words! What were little words, to tell all he wanted to say? But, little or great, they were all he had to give, and on they flowed, faster, stronger. He was not talking of some one who had never really lived; he was not even talking of some one who had long since ceased to live, but of some one who, with the same great heart that was broken for us, lived now—to-day!

And the Parson had been right about the "answering chord." There wasn't a soul

among the men before him—careless, perverted, rough, as their lives might have been—that hadn't it somewhere, hidden away, did not feel it thrilling within him, as the minister went on. Yes, they liked to hear that! They would have liked to see that! They had never thought it was like that before!

The Parson's soul was aflame within him now. The words dropped like burning coals from his lips, as clearer, stronger, more glorious, in his own mind and heart, burned what he wanted them to convey; his voice now dropped into low cadence, now ringing clear and high, as he sketched in one line after another of the life he was trying to picture to their view.

His audience was listening, breathless. They were not standing under Bobolus' Oak; they were lifted into princely company—they were touching the hem of royal robes! The words had ceased for a moment. Was the Parson going to stop? No, he was stooping toward them, and his voice had fallen to the low, mellow strain that touched them most.

"My men! There is one thing more that I wish I could say. I think that with most people the first thought about a king is that he is rich. But do you know there is only one thing that makes him really rich? And do you know again that that very thing is one that every poor man has? The very same treasure that the poorest of us, thank God, may clasp and hug to his soul. It's name is *Love!* You all know it! There isn't one of you that will say me nay. When your day's work is done, and you turn toward home, what is it that is kindling that warm spot in your heart? Making your feet hasten, tired as they may be? What are you reaching out after? What are you looking forward to most, though unconsciously to yourself?

"It is not the gold you have been toiling so many days to accumulate; it is not warmth or food or rest. It is that bright eyes are watching for you from the window, that smiles are waiting for you there, that the patter of eager little feet will be heard, the door will be opened by eager hands, with a cry of joy! And when you are inside, and the little ones crowd around you, do you feel quite

satisfied even with that? No, you feel hungry yet, till you have gathered one and another to you, felt their touch, and pressed them close. They are *yours!*

"Here is your treasure! You *love!* But even that is not enough. You are still hungry till you feel the touch of love back again. You want to feel little arms about your neck, pressing close, with all their tiny strength; you want to feel soft cheeks laid against yours; you want to ask questions just to hear the answers, 'I am glad you have come; I love you.' Then, *then*, my men, your cup is full! If anyone would offer you all the gold the world ever saw mined, all the treasures it ever saw unearthed, in exchange for this wealth, you would drive them from you with scorn. To love, and to feel love given back to you, this is to be rich indeed!

"And this is the way with our Lord, with the King in his beauty! This is what he made this world for, that he who was rich before might be richer still, by loving *us!* Just us—little, ignorant, faulty children like our own.

"But even that was not enough! He

wanted *us* to love *him!* He wants to feel our love coming back to him. He wants to see our arms uplifted to him, to feel us drawing close to him, wanting to walk beside him, following hard."

The Parson's voice fell again to the low tone that thrilled them all. "Our King, in his beauty, does not feel as rich as he wishes to be until we give him this. Who will refuse him? Who will say him nay? 'We love him, because he first loved us.'"

The words had ceased again. Was it over? Must they go now? No, he was speaking again. His head was bowed, his hand lifted over them, his voice yearning and low. "Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be and abide with you *all*, forever!"

The men stood motionless for a moment. Things about them did not seem real. They had been far away; they did not want to come back. But slowly there was a stir; they were gathering themselves together; they were turning away. Then a voice whispered through the ranks, "Can't we thank him,

boys? There wasn't no hat passed. We can't go like that."

They knew no other way. Some one gave the signal, and three earnest cheers rose on the still air. Then they broke up, and by twos and threes the crowd melted away.

CHAPTER V

Little 'Un

Only Dinky Jake went on by himself. He did not feel like talking, and tramped on silently alone. "If only he hadn't said that about Little 'un," he kept saying over and over in his thoughts; "if only he hadn't said that about Little 'un, I could have stood up squarer under it all." It was not far to his house, and but little farther to Steve Steady's, where Steve's new wife always kept Jake's child while he was away. He had brought the baby in his arms when he first came to Wingtown four years before, his one and only treasure in life.

"How did the Parson know about that?" he was asking himself. "How did he ever find out about that? Rich? Well, I should say! There isn't a man within a hundred miles of here that would think 'twas safe to offer me his pile for—pshaw! What am I talking about? And it's late already for Little 'un."

People were always asking why he did not leave the child where she was for the night. "They don't know," he answered to himself; "it's no use trying to tell them. If I couldn't see that there baby lying in her bed nights, and trundle it close to mine, and listen to her breathing there, the last sound I hear, and know the first one in the morning will be her voice calling 'Dad,' and see her eyes laughing, it would make a bigger hole in my life than I care to have anybody know."

He was almost home now; he stepped in at the next door, and a glance showed him the child sleeping. With a nod to the woman beside it he lifted it carefully, gathering it into his arms. "Little 'un!" he said, gently, "Little 'un! It's Dad. Dad's late to-night."

The child's large eyes opened for a moment, a smile flitted over the lips, and a tiny arm stole around Jake's neck. "Are you glad, Little 'un?" The arm round his neck tightened, the curly head nestled closer, and with a sigh of content she was asleep again. Jake pressed her closer to him, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and strode away. Without disturbing her he opened his own

door, struck a light, and sat down in a big rocking chair, the only article of luxury in his house.

For an hour he sat motionless there, watching every outline from the curved eyelids to the dimple in the rounded chin. Every word the Parson had said seemed to be ringing through his heart and soul. He could feel his heart beating against the child's light weight. "Yes," he said, softly, "it's the loving! That's where the riches comes in. If the Parson was me he couldn't have knowed it all better."

He rose at last, undressed the child, and laid it, as tenderly as if his big hands had been a mother's, in its tiny bed and stood looking at her. Then with a sudden intensity he whispered slowly, " And if she should ever say—if that little gal should ever say—that she didn't love me back—if she should say that—a revolver couldn't make quicker work with Dinky Jake. And that's what the Parson says I'm telling the King in his beauty! And I've never done much for her! I've got her little pile panned out, and put away for her, but she don't know that,

and I'd die for her if there was any call, but I haven't done it, as the Parson says the Lord Christ has for me!"

He dropped on his knees, and bowed his head against the child's little form. "Our Father, who art in heaven"—he could go no further. The window was open, and it seemed as if the smell of violets came in as it used to when he said it by his mother's knee. Then he lifted his head, and threw his hands upward with a sudden reach. "The Lord is my Shepherd! He restoreth my soul!" he sobbed.

CHAPTER VI

Over Crazy-Rail Bridge

Indian summer days are fleeting and few, and the next morning a north wind was whirling the last few leaves down from Bobolus' Oak, and piling them in yellow and russet heaps. "I's wading in a gold mine!" sang the Parson's little girl as she danced round and round the tree, her hands waving time to her steps over her head. "And it wustles wound my feet! Wustles wound my feet! It's *beautiful* gold!"

But inside, in the little sitting room, there was no singing. The Parson's wife sat silently at her sewing. She did not like the sound of the wind passing the house. She knew too well the change that every gust was bringing. She drew her shoulders together with a little shiver. "No, I was not crossing the bridge too soon," she was saying to herself. "A very few more of these cold turns, and winter is upon us. I am well enough provided for, and so is the child, but

there is nothing for Edward!" and she felt the tears springing to her eyes.

In the next room the Parson sat at his writing table; he did not know it was cold! A big glad glow at his heart seemed to keep everything warm. He was thinking about last night. A heavy shadow fell upon his paper; a broad-shouldered man was passing the window, and he held a letter in his hand. The Parson was at the door in an instant. "Dinky Jake! Glad to see you at my house! Come in and try the fire. You look as if it was sharp."

"Thank'ee, Parson. I ain't comin' in. I was over at the Center, and there was a letter for you, and I thought I'd bring it across. I hope I didn't do wrong."

"Wrong!" exclaimed the Parson. "You were kind, as you always are. But come in!"

"No, Parson, I'm going by. But I did want to speak to you about them cheers last night. I knowed it wasn't the right thing, but the boys didn't know no other way to speak out the big thank'ee they wanted to give back. I hope there's no offense."

"Offense! It made me hope I'd got to

their hearts, and that has kept mine warm all night."

The miner turned as if to go, hesitated, and then faced about again. "Parson," he said, suddenly, "did you ever know how I come to get the 'Dinky' part tacked to my name?"

"Never; tell me please."

"When I was a little shaver we all lived down to Tampa, and the folks there always called the little boat that trailed at a vessel's stern the 'dinky.' Then they got to calling me that, because I so forever kept after my dad. I thought the sun got up and set down to please him; and somehow the name always stuck to me. I don't know how it is, Parson," and the minister could see a movement of Jake's throat that twitched at his loose cravat, "I don't know how it is, but somehow, when I am with you, I always wish I could be little again, and could trail after *you!*"

"Come!" answered the minister, eagerly. "Come on! Together, though, and not trailing. Closer than that! Let us follow our Lord Christ together, and holding his hand!"

Jake shook his head regretfully. "I'm afeared

you wouldn't either of you like it," he said. "My feet don't seem sot to make the right kind of tracks." He turned away again. "But I can't think," he said over his shoulder, "how you knowed all that about the Little 'un, her and me." And he was gone.

The minister looked after him, and watched him down the slope that led away from the parsonage. "Dear old Jake!" he said, "he *must* come!" and he turned to the letter in his hand. "Lassie!" he exclaimed a moment later, coming in with it to where she sat. "What do you think? The Bishop is coming! Taking us in his round! That will do us good as water in a thirsty land—eh, Lassie?"

She looked at him with a bright smile. "It will indeed, Edward. You know I think the land is pretty thirsty here, but this will make it blossom as the rose. To see a civilized soul and hear civilized conversation once more!"

"Lassie, you are a fraud! You *sound* as though you were never cut out for a home missionary's wife, but unfortunately for the fraud I happen to know you are the best one ever made."

"How did you get the letter?"

"Dinky Jake brought it over. Lassie, I want that man for the Master so much! It holds me day and night. He could give him such a big, true heart!"

Dinky Jake had been busy all day down at his claim. He had had many thoughts of the Parson, and next to that, of the "Little 'un." She would be watching for him at the window, he knew. There were few evenings that he did not stay with Little 'un; they were too precious to waste away from her. To-night he must go out, but there was no haste. He could wait till the child was asleep.

It was longer than usual to-night. She sat, as she always did, with one arm around Jake's neck and the other hugging Togsie, her precious rag doll, and Jake read his newspaper, answering now and then the incessant chatter that the child kept. The chatter seemed endless this time; but at last the big eyes began to droop, and the hold on Togsie loosened, till she dropped headlong to the floor.

"There's a daisy," murmured Jake. He had a mile to walk after crossing Crazy-Rail Bridge, and with a few caressing words he got

child and doll settled on one pillow, to dream as they would. His lamp had burned out; he would fill it; no, he would light a candle; that would do just as well. He placed it carefully on the table beside the newspaper, closed the door gently and went out.

But he did not see that the candle, too loose already in its socket, toppled under the strong rush of wind he had let in at the door, wavered and fell to the table, and lay there still burning, its long tongue of flame flaring, with deadly certainty, toward the newspaper he had left. "I have to go over the Bridge with Steve," he said as he entered the next house; "would you mind sitting in the big chair, and keeping half an eye on Little 'un, Mrs. Steve? She's asleep, and there's a light and a newspaper there."

"Yes; most willingly." But Jake hesitated.

"Could you make it convenient to go right now?" he asked. "I couldn't leave till I'd know she's all right."

Mrs. Steve rose hastily, and reached for the unfailing shawl that she wore winter and summer over her head. That was always conclusive, and the two men turned and went out.

CHAPTER VII

The Blanket String

But Mrs. Steve had not had time to pick up her knitting and follow them when Red Dory's wife stepped in at the door. It was only a thing or two she wanted to say; she would not keep Mrs. Steve a minute. She dropped into a seat, however, and Mrs. Steve, who had been on her feet all day, turned back to her rocking chair. Her neighbor seemed in no haste, and her "thing or two" multiplied manyfold.

Mrs. Steve fidgeted and cast uneasy glances toward the door, but her visitor's droning monotone went on and on, and poor tired Mrs. Steve's eyelids began to droop. When the monotone ceased she dropped her head on the table on her crossed arms, "for one moment just," and in that moment fell as sound asleep as Little 'un and Togsie next door.

There were no windows in her house on the side next Dinky Jake, and a curl or two

of flame, licking out between the weather-boards of his house, could not make their way to disturb her rest. Up at the parsonage a bright light was still burning; the Parson had been trying to take his wife on one of his holiday trips with a book. He had finished now, and something caught his eye as he passed near a window. A sharp tongue of flame bursting out through a roof! In an instant he was at the door. A cutting blast struck him as he opened it. He turned, caught Old Glory from its dishonored nail, and was gone.

Down the slope he had watched Jake tramping over, down, onward, away! He knew just about where the two cottages lay —he was sure—yes, there was flame bursting out through the front of the first one. His feet scarcely touched the ground as he dashed toward them.

In front of the burning one a crowd was already gathering. The firstcomers had brought buckets of water, and had set them down as useless. The next had overturned them and were trampling their contents into the half-frozen ground. Tired Mrs. Steve

still slept soundly on her plump arms. She did not hear the trampling of feet nor the confusion of excited voices that arose. "T'aint no use—a tinder box like that! Just have to let her go up."

"But Dinky Jake's inside!"

"He's *not* inside!"

"Bring a ladder! There's a shed, isn't there? Try the back."

"The back 's just as bad as the front. It's a burning shell, upstairs and down."

"*Jake!*" shouted a voice, with hands hollowed together for a trumpet.

"Don't be a fool!" answered another; "I met Jake and Steve together t'other side of Crazy Bridge ten minutes ago."

"Where's the Little 'un, then?"

"Don' t you know Dinky Jake? He's never going to turn his back five minutes without knowing she's safe. She's over with Mrs. Steve, bet your life."

At that instant there was a crash at an upper window; it fell out with a sharp shower of a dozen panes of glass upon the ground. Every eye was raised to the opening; a dark figure was standing there between tongues of

flame. It was the Parson! He had kicked out the sash, and was swinging a queer, cornery bundle toward them, wrapped close and slung by a rope of blanket. "Here! Catch this, some of you!" There was a shout and a rush. Every hand snatched at it; they had it, and the Parson had disappeared. What was it? They laid it on the wet ground, and pulled at the knot of blanket.

"His overcoat! And scorched like the mischief! Was the Parson daft?" There was a stir inside the bundle and a smothered cry. With exclamations they tore at it; it was open now, and Little 'un's brown eyes, big with fright, were looking them in the face. One hand had struggled out into the air; the other held Togsie fast by the heel.

Then came the rapid beat of approaching footsteps; strides rather than footsteps, leaps rather than strides; nearer and nearer, then the panting of great breaths, and Jake was there. "Who's got Little 'un?" he cried, hoarsely, as he came up. "All of us!" was the answering shout, and they pulled her from the shapeless bundle to her feet. In an instant she was lifted to Jake's heart; the one

unfailing arm was snuggled round his neck, while the flapping, inverted Togsie was grasped by the other hand. Jake sank on one knee. The strong man's strength was gone. He could not support the weight of the little child!

As the crowd moved away the last man tripped in something and looked back to see what had caught his foot. It was Old Glory, trampled in the mud, ground by a hundred heels, torn, and past recognition, even if the Parson's own eyes had seen it where it lay.

CHAPTER VIII

Sheaves

The next morning another shadow fell on the Parson's writing table, and Jake stood outside the door again, this time with the child at his side, Mrs. Steve's little shawl, still wet with her tears of last night, pinned over its head. Little 'un's things were all gone. "Parson," Jake was saying as he held her tight by the hand; "if anything had happened to this little gal, if that smoke and blaze had got too nigh her once, 'twould have squizzled all that's inside of me to ashes! And the ashes would have burned, too, for they'd have been live fire running back and forth in me all my life. And longer too, I guess, for I could never have got over it, even if I'd found Little 'un a shining angel on the other side, when I got across. And 'twas you, Parson! You—!" but Jake broke down. He could go no farther.

"Jake," said the Parson, hastily, "bring Little 'un into the house this moment! You'll freeze the child out there. Bring her in to see mine. She's wild with excitement about the 'Bundle Baby.' She'll be off her head to see her." He lifted the child gently, coming with it to the grateful warmth, and Jake followed; he would not let more than a few steps come between them.

The Parson looked tenderly into the big brown eyes raised to his, and half shuddered as he pressed her in his arms. Was this the baby face he had found sleeping on its pillow last night, a thick curtain of smoke hanging over it, and tongues of flame thrusting hungrily near? Jake seemed to read his thoughts. "I can't think how you ever done it, Parson. I can't think. I wish I knew." The Parson laughed lightly. It made him feel happy to feel the child nestling there.

"I am afraid I can't tell you, Jake. I saw it was of no use at the front, and I ran to the back. There was a ladder and a shed, and that's about all I know. Those windows were not hard to kick out.

Don't talk about it, though. You're all broken up this morning. Let's find my baby. She's half a year older than yours, and a head taller, and growing like a weed. She can't get into a bit of the toggery she had last year, and she's crazy to see if Little 'un will wear some of it for her. Lily-Bud!" he called, and a patter of little feet came flying in response.

It was Sunday next day, the first Sunday since the talk under Bobolus' Oak. The Parson taking his seat in the little schoolhouse thought of the audience he had had there, and his heart hungered for the men. Would they ever give him another chance? Not here, at least. They had said they should smother to sit here. He began to look over his hymns. Their strong, rich, inspiring words uplifted him. He followed after them; he had almost forgotten where he was.

Suddenly the sound of footsteps was heard—a heavy tramp, near and growing nearer. It was at the door now, and the miners, in solid column, with Dinky Jake at the head, were marching in.

"Guess we know a little something about manners," one of them had said, in answer to looks of surprise outside. "You don't think we're going to let the Parson get a rise on us the way he did last night, and not pay back our compliments the next day, I hope."

When the Parson and his wife went up the slope to the parsonage after service there was a glow in his face and a greater one in his heart. "Lassie," he was saying, "they have come at last! The men! I have wanted them so long. Aren't you glad? I had to throw my sermon over, and find a new one, but it poured out faster than I could speak the words. Aren't you glad for me, Lassie? I have wanted it so long!"

Her face answered for her. "Truly glad!"

"And you would not wish us to go away now, would you? If the granary should begin to fill up? If even a few sheaves were taking the bareness off?"

"No, Edward," she answered, looking proudly into his enthusiastic face; but in spite of the gladness and the pride there

was a wistful look as well. She was thinking of Old Glory, lying in the mud, trampled into hopelessness at last, and left for dead. The air was sharp to-day, and the wind was blowing from the north again.

CHAPTER IX

Letters, and No Letter

The sharp days came oftener now, and sharper every time, and the north wind seemed to have forgotten there was any other point in the compass for a start. The Parson caught wistful glances almost every time he went out; there was not a word said, but he could read them only too well. "Lassie," he said at last, "do not worry your sweetheart. I shall have a letter from the Board soon. If the salary is all right I promise you that Old Glory's lost pride shall be forgotten. And if it is *more* than last year, why," and the smile Red Dory had delighted in broke over his face, "it shall be overcoats in piles, if you say so."

He got the answering smile he wanted, but the next day it was the same thing. "O, Edward, I *wish* that letter would come! It is going to be *bitter* cold!"

"Lassie, you seem to be forgetting what a

young, strong man I am! Don't you think I can breast a little cold?"

"But you are flesh and blood, Edward. I wish the Bishop would come, at least, if he is coming, for it will be a fearful drive to bring him over if this gets worse."

"Take courage, Lassie, the letter is overdue now. It will surely come soon. To-morrow; to-day, perhaps."

To-day did not bring it, nor to-morrow, but they brought a little break in the cold. A south wind had stolen a surprise, and the already fallen snow began to melt. All was sunshine in the little parsonage as the minister opened the front door and went out. "I may not be back until late, Lassie," he said, "and I'll bring a letter if I can."

But as the day passed the flattering weather promise passed with it. Round, round once more into the northwest went the treacherous wind, and everything began to stiffen and sharpen, and turn bitter and keen again. As the Parson neared the house at sunset the eyes that were watching for him saw that his face was pinched and blue, and it went through them like a stab. But

they did not see that there were two letters in his breast pocket, and that one of them was pressing like a lump of ice against his heart.

"Has it come, Edward? Has it come? Let me feel! Yes, there is a letter! It has come at last!"

"Two of them," said the Parson, trying to keep her hand away. "Let me tell you, darling. The Bishop is coming to-morrow. Only a flying visit, though; he cannot stay for a Sunday, as we hoped."

"To-morrow? The Bishop? But the other, Edward? The other? The salary?"

"Yes, Lassie; but not what we hoped for. It will not be larger. It will be smaller this year. We must find a way to manage, with God's help."

And far across the country, under the shadow of the Palisades, another heart felt a load of ice pressing against it because there was no letter. All through that evening, when she had turned away from Tom at the landing, Mildred had watched and listened with a vague terror in her breast. Surely he would come in to say he was sorry he had

vexed her, that he did not mean it, that he—but no, the clock was pointing late, later. He had not come. He could not be coming now. The terror was no longer vague; it was deadly and cold.

Then there would surely be a letter to-morrow. Would that postman never come? Yes, there was his ring, half a dozen letters. She ran over them desperately; not a line of Tom's handwriting anywhere! She had been wrong! She had been hasty! But Tom had been wrong first. She could not be the first to speak; it would not be suitable. Surely to-morrow would bring the message. But to-morrow brought no letter; only a box of roses, There was surely a note somewhere. She tore them out, and shook out the paper that had wrapped them, but there was not a word.

CHAPTER X

The Linen Duster

The Bishop was coming that afternoon. Some one must bring him over, and the station was three bitter miles away. "O, Edward, you *cannot* go! You must find some one else The cold is fiercer than ever to-day. You would perish on that drive."

"Not a bit of it. I can't find anyone else; it is impossible, and wasn't I reminding you how young and strong I am?"

"Then we must find *something* you can wear! *Something* to keep off the sharpest edge."

He turned suddenly and opened a drawer. "Here, Lassie! Here's my last summer's duster. You know you laughed at it last year for being heavy and thick. I will take that. It will be 'another thickness,' you know. So you need not worrry about anything. I shall be all right with this, and I have my warm driving gloves. They are a host."

He was a little early as he reached the station, and he sprang up the steps with a shudder running through his frame. He hoped there would be a good fire. Yes, and before the queer whitewashed fire pot stood the only other occupant of the room, spreading his hands to the glowing coals. It was Brother Montescue, of Hardacre Flat, the nearest parish to the Parson's.

"How are you, Montescue?" exclaimed the Parson, with a hearty grasp. "Glad to see you indeed! I wish you could get over my way once in a while. It would do my soul good." And the two fell into easy conversation for the spare ten minutes, each relishing keenly the taste of companionship so rare of late.

As they ran rapidly over the gamut of talk, from grave to gay, now asking earnestly about each other's work, now breaking out into jovial laughter at some turn of wit, the quick eye of each took in some point in the other's look, and quietly took notes. The Parson noticed that Brother Montescue had no driving gloves. Also that the handwarming seemed an operation delightful to his soul,

and the Parson tucked his own treasures farther out of sight in the duster pocket, wishing they were both right handers, so that he could make Brother Montescue accept one for the winter's drives.

Also Brother Montescue's overcoat seemed to have been good protection; he had unbuttoned it now, as if there were warmth to spare, but the edges were raw, the buttonholes and elbows shaky to say the least, and the Parson was sure there had been a heartache over the last attempt at mending them up. And he felt, rather than saw, that the suit underneath was shakier yet—frayed and shiny, and unsuitably thin for this time of the year. But what a fine, manly fellow Brother Montescue was! Cultivated, intelligent, straightforward, and good. He wished the two parishes were nearer together. What a treat a talk once a week would be!

And Brother Montescue was thinking what a superb, intellectual head and face the Parson had, what a wonderful eye, what a finely chiseled mouth and chin! Pretty choice material to be spending on those miners and

settlers over in Wingtown. But no finer than St. Paul's though, eh?

And amid his other reflections his eye sent a side shot now and then at the linen duster. Was the Parson wearing something so fine he didn't want it looked at, or had he gone off his head and forgotten that dust did not fly under a foot of snow, even in prairie towns?

"See here, brother," he exclaimed at last, suddenly, leaning forward till his finger could just lay an apologetic touch on a button of the mysterious duster, "may I rise to inquire, is this a cover to something too fine to show, or is it a latest fad you are airing this afternoon?"

The clear, mellow laugh of the Parson rang out heartily. "Not a bit of either, Montescue. When I have a fad to air I shall choose a different temperature from this afternoon. I'm short an overcoat this winter; that's the whole mystery in a nutshell, and I believe we poor fellows around the fields of this region are pretty well used to shortage somewhere."

A shade passed over Brother Montescue's

face. He thought of all the mouths to feed in his own house, and then he didn't like that duster for the Parson. It wouldn't be much trouble for pneumonia to make its way through that, he thought. "It's a scheme, though," added the Parson, "it takes off quite an edge, I find. When I get a new overcoat, I'll pass this over to you. You're about my height and breadth. I think your fit and mine are about the same." And the same old illuminating smile lighted up his face. But there was the whistle; the train was coming in.

The wind was dead in their faces as the Parson drove his visitor home, and the last mile was pretty bitter to the Bishop, well-coated and tucked in as he was, and warm with the welcome the Parson had given him. He glanced sidewise two or three times at the linen duster with much the same furtive wondering as Brother Montescue. Perhaps this prairie dust—but nonsense! And it was no business of his, of course.

Once inside the parsonage, though, it was midsummer again with light and warmth,

good cheer and friendliness. But it was to be a short visit; the Bishop must go in the morning—a short treat to the Parson, and he entered into it with eagerness. The two men talked until the night was well on; books, current events and interests in the world, in the churches, and in the Parson's little field. The Bishop heard all about the people, the little schoolhouse, the Sunday school, before they had done, and last of all, with all the Parson's enthusiasm, about the mining claims, the miners, and the evening at Bobolus' Oak.

The Bishop looked uneasily at the Parson, as thoughts similar to Brother Montescue's were passing through his mind. Fine material to be spending here. But fine material was wanted. Duller clay could never do the same work. "Your second year is drawing near a close," he said, "I *hope* you will not want to be transferred. You have been doing good work."

The Parson returned a wistful look into his visitor's eyes. "I don't know, Bishop! I *can't* tell. I wouldn't hesitate for myself, but —I have the bravest wife in the country, but

I sometimes fear it is putting too great a strain upon her. Give me a little time. I love all my people, and I love my work; but I want those men down there, Bishop! I want those men!"

CHAPTER XI

Lily-Bud

The time for leave-taking came quickly the next day; the return to the station must be made before noon. "I have some little preparations to make," said the Parson; "if you will excuse me a few moments. Lily-Bud, come and entertain the Bishop till Mamma comes in."

She came, with the confidence that children know so well where to give, and the Bishop lifted her to his knee. She sat motionless at first, only smoothing down her dainty white pinafore, while her large eyes scanned her new object-lesson silently. "Your hair is white," she said, suddenly, and the Bishop admitted the fact. "And it's even all over. My Papa's curls is all burned off, on one side, because he frowed a little girl out of the window."

"Threw a little girl out of the window!" repeated the Bishop.

"Yes," replied Lily-Bud, nodding gravely.

"The house had a fire. It was Dinky Jake's little girl, and he loved her awfully, and my Papa frowed her out in Ole Dlory, with a blanket for a string; and she wasn't hurted a bit; only Ole Dlory, that was all."

"Old Glory! And who was Old Glory?"

"It was a overcoat; but Mamma called it wag-bag. And it was all gwounded up and be-dwaggletailed the next day."

"Gwounded up and be-dwaggletailed! You certainly are a most entertaining young lady. What did they do with Old Glory after that?"

"Nothing. They couldn't," said the child, shaking her head slowly till the ripples of golden hair that fell over her shoulders shimmered in the sunlight. "So now my Papa hasn't *any* overcoat any more. Only a linen dusting cloth, that is all."

"What!" shouted the Bishop, in a voice like a two-edged sword, and with a start that nearly threw the child off his knees. So this was what the linen duster meant! This was the out-of-season mystery he had not had wit enough to catch!

"No," went on Lily-Bud, reseating herself, and searching the Bishop's face again. "He

didn't have two overcoats; only but one. He most promised, and *most* promised Mamma he would have one, but—" she stopped, suddenly. "Was you ever in New York?" she began again.

"Once or twice."

"It must be an awful queer place. They have boards there that can talk."

"Boards that can talk!"

"Yes; there's one there that can talk and wite too, and it wited my Papa a letter, and said he couldn't have any new overcoat. There wouldn't be money enough."

"Not money enough!" So this was what it all meant! No overcoat; only a linen duster! "Good God, what were the people at the East thinking of!"

"No, not even so much money as there was *last* winter," went on the child, accentuating again with little nods. "I heard him tell Mamma so, and she cwied and cwied. But I guess she'll forget about it. That's what she always tells me when I cwy," and she smoothed the white pinafore once more.

"Lassie," the Parson was saying, "I shall

be busy for ten minutes yet. Can't you get in and see the Bishop? And send Lily-Bud out to me. She'll tire him." She went, and the child sped away. The Bishop sprang to his feet and went straight to her, with his hand held out. "Madam!" he said, "would you have let me go away without knowing what, above all things, I ought to know?" And from the depths of a full burning heart his excited words poured in a stream. Then he heard the Parson and the child coming nearer, and he spoke faster than ever.

"I am going direct to New York," he said, "at least after a call on Brother Montescue. I know scores of people there who could send an overcoat out here as easily as you could send back a postage stamp. I shall see to it. Tell that superb husband of yours to 'trust in God, and keep his powder dry;' that is to say, keep near the fireplace, till you hear from me. And may the grace of our Lord be with you all!"

CHAPTER XII

The Dinner Party

"What a blessed change of weather!" the Parson was saying, cheerily, as he tucked the Bishop into the sleigh, and took his seat beside him. The Bishop did not answer; he could not have spoken a word, for the choking in his throat, as the sleeve of the linen duster came against that of his own warm outside coat.

When he was gone life settled down for a long winter pull in the parsonage with only little everyday ups and downs, and work, to meet, but a quick ear caught a little hacking cough that the Parson could not keep down. "I don't like it, Edward! You have had it ever since that bitter drive from the station."

"So long ago, Lassie? You are dreaming."

"I wish I were, Edward. It goes through me like a knife. It would wake me from the deepest dream."

"But, Lassie, that cough is no cough at all, and no ears but your own pretty ones would even think it was there."

Once more, still, Mildred's heart had leaped to meet the postman's ring that morning. No letter at all this time, only the box of roses she had come to recognize now. If he would only send a word! O, she had been wrong, she knew it now; but so had Tom. He ought not to have left her so! She was not the one to speak first; but O, this cruel waiting!

Yes, there was a letter after all! A tiny one tucked under the string of the box! And the postmark was New York! With an exclamation she sprang toward it, but half a glance showed her it was not *the one*, and her hand dropped. She wished people would not write to her. What did *she* want of letters?

She opened it, however, listlessly. Her old schoolfellow, Marion Benedict. What could *she* be writing for? Evidently Marion Benedict knew. "You are to pack up and come down within an hour after receiving

this," she said, "and not a word to the contrary. You remember that dear old Bishop that used to make so much of you and me? He has come to town again, and Mamma is having him to dinner, and a few other people, and you *must* come. We will have *such* fun, and I haven't seen you for an age." She dropped the letter listlessly. *She* go to New York! Go to a dinner party! What a farce! Suddenly she caught up the letter again. Yes, she would go! Anything was better than watching for the postman's ring here. She rang for her maid and for the carriage.

The little dinner company was assembling, but Mildred did not want them to come in too fast. She was having such a gay, happy time with the Bishop. "Just the same dear old soul as ever," she was saying to herself, "and how lovely that he remembered me!"

And the Bishop, on his part, was thinking, "Wonderful what two or three years' time does for a girl! Why, she was a child, I thought, and here is a society beauty in full bloom. Those roses she is wearing are only a shadow of her."

Dinner was announced, but there was an instant's delay for a belated guest, and Mildred's sparring with the Bishop ran on. The instant was short, however; the guest had come in, and Marion was whispering, "We are giving you both a surprise! But don't think we will let him take you out. Papa has bespoken that pleasure for himself."

Mildred glanced toward the end of the dining room, where her hostess was greeting the newcomer. Her heart gave a fierce leap against Tom's flowers. The room swam. It was Tom himself, and she knew that he saw the roses!

But they were going out at once to the dining room, and in the momentary confusion no one noticed that they did not meet. The dinner was over at last; forever, it had seemed to Mildred, and her hostess was saying, "You have been making quite a tour of the West, have you not, Bishop?"

"Yes, every parish in my State, from one end to the other. I have seen many interesting people and things. I think of writing a book," with the old smile that had endeared him to so many hearts.

"O give us the first chapter now! Tell us a story, we beg," came from every hand.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "if you wish it I will. I have one that I would like to tell you. I will call it 'The Wingtown Parson's Linen Duster.'"

He began at the beginning, and when he had finished his listeners felt that they knew Wingtown. They knew the Parson's handsome, spiritual face, and Lassie's sweet housewifely charm. They saw the child's golden hair and deep blue eyes. They knew Dinky Jake and Little 'un, and saw the men under Bobolus' Oak, and heard the cheers. They saw the flames licking up Jake's house, and Little 'un swinging out in Old Glory "with a blanket for a string," and saw Old Glory lying "gwounded up and be-dwaggletailed," on the ground afterward. They saw the miners tramping into the little church. They saw the linen duster, and felt the fierce bitterness of the cold on the long drive. "And the thermometer was just two above zero that afternoon," said the Bishop as he ceased.

No one spoke, no one stirred, no one seemed to breathe. The hostess rose, and

they returned to the drawing room. Tom went straight to the Bishop with an eager face. "Bishop," he said, "I was the youngest man at the table, and I blush to be chasing you up for the first favor, the first privilege, but I want you to let me send you a check for that overcoat!"

"Send it then," answered the Bishop with a hand grasp, "and to-morrow, please. There is no time to lose," and then some one called him away; and Tom turned instantly to Mildred, who stood close by and looked her in the eyes. "Mildred! I was wrong in the beginning, and wrong all the way through; blind as a mole! Can the same sweet charity that has done so many good works hold out a pardon to me?"

CHAPTER XIII

Going Away

"Trust in God, and keep close to the fireplace," was excellent advice, but, like much other, easier to give than to follow. Every day brought some duty call to the Wingtown Parson, and every day Lassie's quick ear followed the cough that he had declared "was no cough at all." "O *don't* go out, Edward!" she pleaded constantly. "Do let things wait a few days. We shall surely hear something soon."

"I'll be as careful as I possibly can, Lassie," he would answer, but there was always some demand, some requirement that could not be put off, and every day he came in looking unnaturally pinched and blue.

At last came a bitter storm, and in the midst of it a call to a dying man. The Parson buttoned the linen duster tight, and turned up the collar to his ears; but when he came in he went quickly to the stove, shivering, and stretched his hands to the fire.

"Could you bring me a hot drink, Lassie? I seem to feel chilled this time."

The chill lasted far into the night, but the next morning there was burning fever in its place. No need to fear going out to-day; the Parson could not lift his head, and the Doctor looked very uncomfortable as he got into his gig. "I'd rather see pneumonia keep its hands off such a man as that," he said.

Each day seemed stranger to the Parson's child now. The illness, the trouble, the hush. No more dancing through the room; she came with awestricken footsteps, and finger on her lip. "Lily-Bud," he said, reaching out a hand, as she stood hesitating, "I'm afraid Papa is going away from his little girl."

"Is it very far?" she whispered.

"Very," said the Parson; and then he was wandering again. "Lassie, I want those men! I want Dinky Jake! I can't go without Dinky Jake!"

The child had heard him say that before; she had heard it more than once, and now, if her Papa was going away, he must have his wish. She stole unnoticed from the room. A tiny scarlet hood, white-lined and sharp-

peaked, lay on a hall chair. She caught it, and put it on. A dash of fine snow sifted in her face, as she opened the front door. It was coming down fast. "Dess I couldn't take a 'bwellow," she said, "might tip over," and she cast a swift glance into the next room. "There's Mamma's pa'ssol. She lended it to me one day when the sun was scotching hot."

She seized the dainty thing, raised it, and sped out. She did not know where to find Dinky Jake, but she knew where the blackened embers of his house stood. He would not be far from there. Down the slope and away she made her way in haste, the fresh snow gathering in tufts on her tiny shoes. What a long, long way! Would she never come to the black house?

She was near it now, and there was a man, showered with snow, coming toward it, too. "Are you Dinky Jake?" she called.

"Yes," answered the astonished voice, and then as the figure came nearer, "and you are the Parson's little gal! Has your head gone light?"

"My head is always light; my Papa calls

it sunlight. But I wish you would huwwy, please. My Papa is going away, and he wants you before he goes."

A nameless dread seized Dinky Jake, and paralyzed him where he stood. His veins seemed turned to ice. "Please come," urged the child. "We can't stop. My Papa says it is very far, and he might be gone."

In a moment Jake had swung off his coat —what did he care for snow—wrapped the child in it, brushed the snow from her shoes with his red handkerchief, and they went on with swift strides. As the child had opened the front door the Parson's wife had been untying a parcel in the next room. She had known what it was the instant it was brought in. The overcoat had come at last.

"Your things have come," she said, gently, rousing him as she came back. "An overcoat, and there is a suit of clothes."

A smile of pleasure flitted over his face. "Bring them, please, Lassie; I would like to see." He passed a white hand slowly over them, the pleased smile brightening as his touch rested upon each. "How soft! How warm! How beautiful! Bury me in the

suit, Lassie. I shall feel more respectable in my grave."

The door opened, and a little scarlet-hooded figure came in, with an imperative gesture to some one who was following behind, to wait. But her father's eyes were wide open, and fixed upon her, and she beckoned to her follower to advance. "See, Papa! I've bringed Dinky Jake. You said you wanted him."

The old light came into the Parson's face, and he stretched out a hand to Jake. "Yes! I want you! I have wanted you all the time. I want you for the Master, Jake!" Jake had dropped to his knees beside the bed, and was burying his face against the Parson's hand, his strong frame shaken. "You can have me, then, heart and soul, if there's anything worth takin'! You can tell him so when you see him; and I'd go with you joyfully if it wasn't for Little 'un—for the little gal."

He would not go away after that; they must let him stay—he needed no sleep. In the morning the rumor had got abroad, and some one was asking for him, at the little side door. When he returned he stooped over the

Parson's bed. "There's two or three more, Parson, that want you to hand in their names with mine. There's Big Tom and Dory and Steve. They say that if the Master's all you've told 'em, and lived out to 'em, they can't say him nay, no more. He can have all there is of them if he will."

A great gladness came into the Parson's eyes. "Lassie!" he said, beckoning to her, but the words came slowly now. "The granary —I shall not leave it—quite bare! The sheaves are—beginning—" His voice failed him. "It is dark, Lassie. I do not see you. Come nearer, please; and bring Lily-Bud."

The child drew closer and pressed the palm of one tiny hand against his cheek, as had been her way always, when she nestled in his arms. "Listen, Lassie! Nearer!" he whispered. "Don't put those clothes on me for my burial. Send them to Brother Montescue. He needs them more than I do. Give me the old ones. I shall rest just as well—and—I shall not be there! Absent from the body—present—with the—" They waited mutely; and while they waited the voice had ceased—the eyes had closed, and from the

face shone a great light. A great and wonderful light of joy and of triumph in one. Stronger, brighter, and more wonderful it grew, until the simple folk of the parish who stole in, one by one, all day, to look lovingly upon the face of the dead, went out uplifted. They had beheld within the Gates!

When the simple services in the little schoolhouse were over there came once more the tramp of the miners' feet. They lifted him to their shoulders, six of them—they would not let him be taken in any other way—and the rest followed as mourners, through the falling snow.

And as they stood, hushed, to hear the "Dust to dust" spoken, there rang out joyfully, thousands of miles away, under the shadow of the Palisades, the wedding bells of Mildred and Tom.

CHAPTER XIV

Too Late

A week later Jake stood at the little side door again. He had been there countless times before, every day finding some new services to do. This time he put a little bag into Lassie's hand. It was very small, but it seemed strangely heavy as he dropped it into her palm. "Just a few little lumps that the boys wanted me to bring you," he said, "and they want you to use it for his sake. It'll take you back to places you and he ought never to have left for us. God bless him that he thought we were worth it! And he got us now, some of us, whatever we are, forever more!"

That morning a letter was brought to Mildred once more. She had ceased to watch for the postman now, but this time she recognized the Bishop's handwriting, and seized the envelope eagerly. She uttered a cry, and Tom, turning hastily, saw what he had never seen before—tears streaming down Mildred's

face. "O, Tom! It was too late! Too late! Too late after all! I had loved that package so! I had followed it almost every day and hour. I knew almost the moment when it ought to be received. And it was only too late!"

"Too late?" repeated Tom, bitterly disappointed himself, and he took the letter from her hand, reading it hurriedly.

"Tom," said Mildred that evening, as they watched the sunset colors fading in the sky, "cannot we bring them to our home for this winter—that sweet lady and that exquisite child? The house is three times large enough, and the money ten times more. *Cannot* we, Tom?"

"If there is no one else who has a stronger claim," he answered, "we can try."

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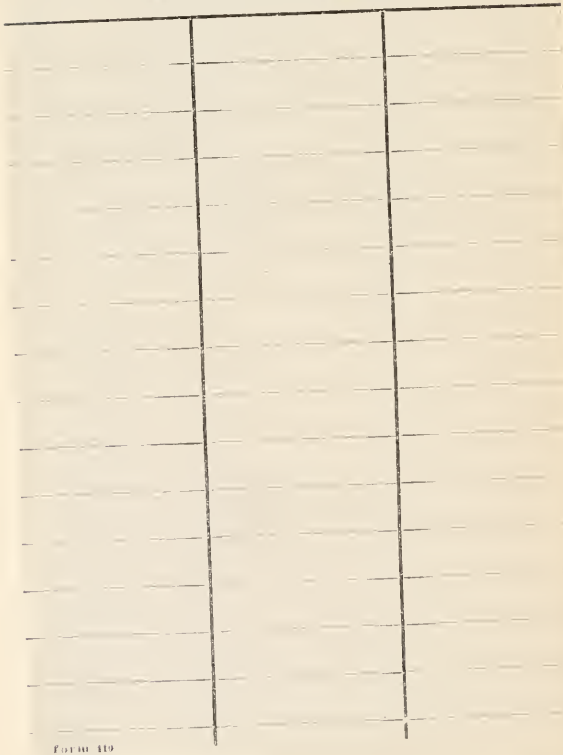

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